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CHILDREN await the festival of Holi with tremendous excitement, looking forward to the elation of throwing water balloons or *gubaras* and using their water pistols to shoot coloured water at everyone. All this fun also makes them more likely to sustain injuries and catch ailments as their skin is delicate and immune system weak, making them susceptible to allergies.

Doctors recommend that parents be extra cautious about the manner in which children be allowed to play.

Dr Nevin Kishore, senior chest consultant, Max Hospital, says children in the age group of 5-12 years are prone to asthma and other allergic reactions. "One in every five children is prone to allergic reactions in Delhi. The incidence goes down as they grow up, but parents need to be extra cautious that children don't inhale colour and their skin is protected with lubricants," he says.

Being drenched in water and staying wet for hours are also bad for the health. "Since the body temperature drops, kids

Children are more prone to allergies

are more likely to catch infections and fall sick. Cough, cold and chest infections are very common," says Dr Nitin Verma, senior consultant paediatrics, Max Hospital. It's better to let them play with water around noon when the day temperature is at peak. A thermal inner wear would also be helpful. Discourage your children from playing Holi with eggs or mud. Never turn a blind eye to such unclean ways of celebration. Keep a big bucket of water handy for any emergencies that may occur.

Children are more likely to ingest colours than adults too. "Colours are toxic and ingesting them can be equated with chemical poisoning," says Dr Rajiv Seth, senior consultant paediatrician with Rockland Hospital. He says anyone who has swallowed chemicals should be made to vomit as soon as possible.

Drinking warm water with salt or using the finger technique can induce vomiting. Child should be made to lie down on their left side so that the bile does not move to the wind pipe.

"If a large quantity of colour

has been ingested, it has to be flushed out from the stomach at a hospital," he cautions. Besides other chemicals, colour may also contain lead which has proven to be particularly harmful for children giving rise to convulsions and unconsciousness.

Pichkaris, favourites with children, have also changed and become more harmful. Traditional *pichkaris* have given way to foreign water guns, which can be categorised as industrial tools. While the amount of force exerted through traditional *pichkaris* was minimal and the chances of children or adults getting injured were limited, this has changed.

The modern water guns are made of plastic or tin and use nylon washers. They have less weight, larger stroke length and larger diameter. The net result is that a large amount of fluid can be delivered in one stroke at a very high speed and pressure. The chances of sustaining injuries are very high especially when used from a close range.

"More force would not be detrimental if you are getting hit on the stomach or chest, but if hit on the face and eye, it can lead to serious injuries. Water balloons have always been known to cause injuries of the ear and eyes," says Dr Nitin Verma. It's better to use traditional water guns.

If colour enters the eye, wash it with clean water immediately. "Use antibiotic eye drops along with artificial tears which would act as soothing agents. Don't use steroid drops without prescription of a doctor since that may aggravate the condition," says Dr Umesh Bareja, consultant ophthalmologist with Sitaram Bhartia Institute of Science and Research.

Paying attention to children's food on this day is important since children often tend to forget about eating on festival days. It's best to give them a heavy breakfast full of carbohydrates and protein.

"A good breakfast can take care of falling energy levels through the day. Give a milk-based product like *kheer* or custard along with sandwiches made of eggs or potatoes. Stuffed paneer *paranthas* or soya cutlets are also good options. Also give nuts like almonds since they provide for the iron needed in plenty during growing up years," says Dr Geetika Ahluwalia, chief dietician with Delhi Heart and Lung Institute.